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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/PPD and NEA/PPD

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SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: Muted reaction to the Middle East

Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Though Macedonia has a significant Muslim population, the response to the conflict between Israel and Hamas has been very quiet thus far. Coverage of the events in the Middle East has been limited to reprinting wire stories and standard video feed, and there has been no commentary in either Albanian language or Macedonian language news. The government has not spoken out about the conflict. There have been no public rallies or protests. Our security situation at the Embassy has been stable and we currently have no reason to believe that will change. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Macedonia's population is primarily divided between ethnic Macedonians and ethnic Albanians, with the majority of the latter being Muslim. Though ethnic Albanians comprise as much as 30% of the population, the country is not seized by the recent events in the Middle East. Albanian language dailies and TV news shows do include straight-forward coverage of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, but the absence of commentary is noticeable, especially in light of what we have seen in Europe as a whole. Macedonian language media similarly has continued to cover the conflict with wire services and reprints of articles appearing in other US and western European media. To this point, neither local commentaries nor opinion pieces from other international media have appeared.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: Though we believe this dearth of critical commentary is largely owing to the very insular focus in the media and in the interests of the citizens of Macedonia in general with the Orthodox Christmas holiday week also contributing, we also believe that the strong standing of the United States here largely eliminates any inclination or incentive to criticize U.S. foreign policy or blame us for problems in the Middle East. Macedonia recently completed its five year involvement in Iraq, rotated troops with the NATO mission in Afghanistan, and in general takes pride in its strong friendship with the United States. We believe our continued support of Macedonia in a wide range of areas has helped create a positive view of America across the political and ethnic spectrum here. End Comment.

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